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THE PRESENT STATE
OF THE
ORKNEY ISLANDS
CONSIDERED,
AND
AN ACCOUNT
OF
THE NEW METHOD OF FISHING
ON THE COASTS OF
S H E T L A N D.

by James Fearn.

PUBLISHED IN 1775.

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III

THE PRESENT STATE
OF THE
ORKNEY ISLANDS
CONSIDERED,

WITH

AN ACCOUNT of their advantageous Situation, and Conveniences for TRADE ; the Improvements
they are capable of, &c.

THE WHOLE

Calculated to shew, by what means their usefulness to the
BRITISH EMPIRE, and the Happiness of
their own INHABITANTS
may be increased.

By JAMES FEA, SURGEON.

HOLY-ROOD HOUSE,

Printed in the YEAR

MDCCCLXXV.





HE little books which are here reprinted came from the pen of an enthusiastic and patriotic Orcadian, who wrote with the intention of arousing British capitalists to the commercial capabilities of the Northern Islands, and of stimulating his countrymen to greater agricultural and mercantile activity.

With these ends in view he proceeds to describe the Islands, enumerating their natural advantages, giving an account of "the methods used at present by the inhabitants for their subsistence," and concluding with

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Under this last head he argues that

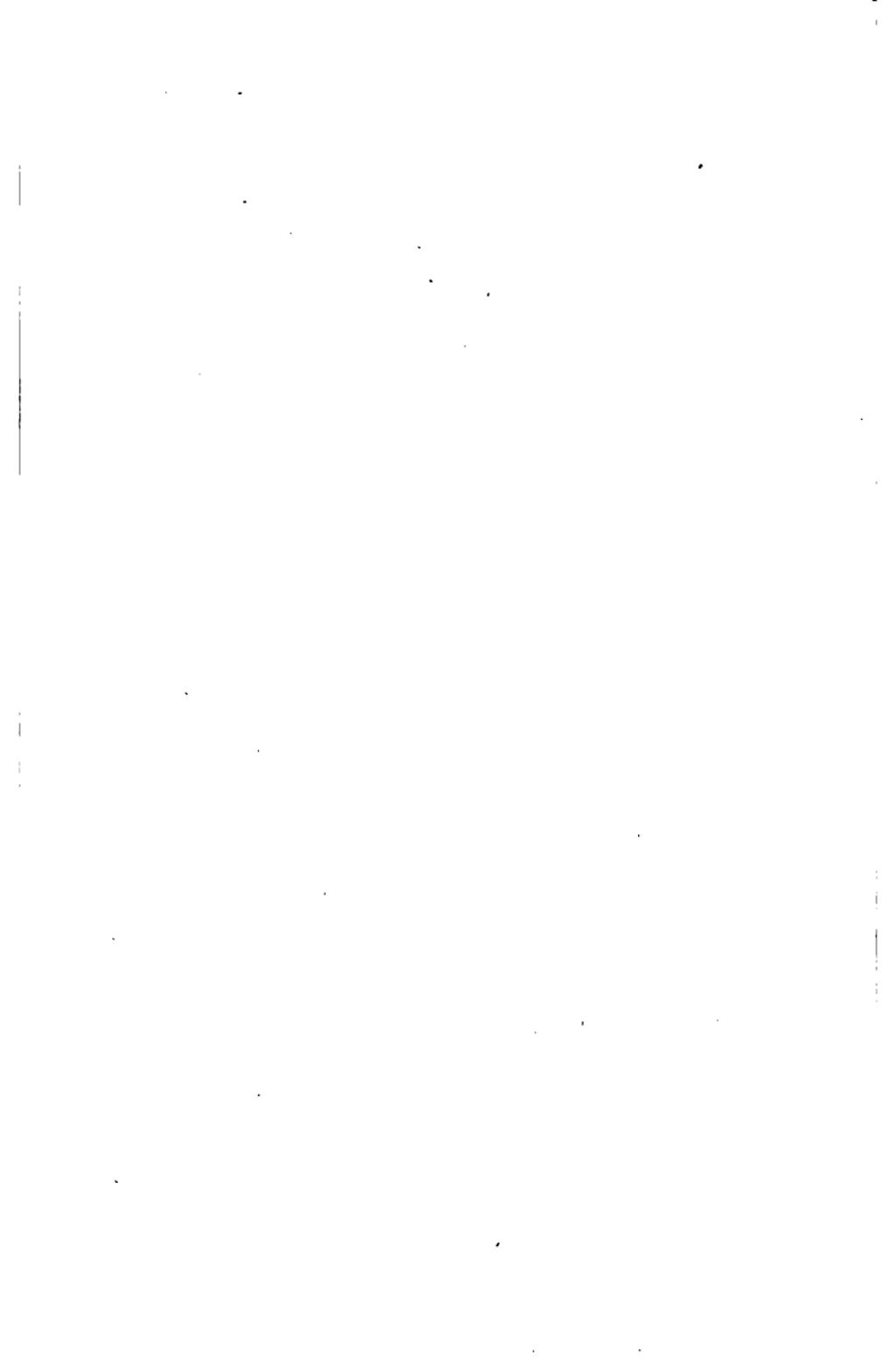
the advantages derived from the situation of the islands “are certainly very singular, and never can be enough insisted on,” and that they “might become the very centre of trade to all the northern kingdoms of Europe;” but, above all, he lays stress upon the development of the Fisheries as the future source of revenue. His judgment in this matter has been strikingly supported by recent experience, and it is therefore all the more interesting to learn from his pages the state of the industry in his own times, and the returns obtained from it.

In expatiating upon this subject, however, he does not neglect other matters of importance, but gives information as to the Relation of Landlord and Tenant, the Habits and Customs of the people, and the Ornithology of the Islands. It is curious to find that he

advocates longer leases as a remedy for the inertness of the people, for “while their leases are so short as they just now are, it is an utter inconsistency,” he says, “to suppose that the tenants will apply themselves to anything.”

The Book upon “*The New Method of Fishing on the Coasts of Shetland*” was issued separately, but is the complement of the larger work upon Orkney, and appeared in the same year and from the same press.

The Publisher believes that this re-issue will prove acceptable at a time when the matters touched upon are so much before the public, and when these Islands are so favourite a resort of the Tourist, the Sportsman, and the Antiquary.



ledge increase ; whereas, among those who are confined within their own country, all the liberal arts, though in ever so much perfection at first, gradually decrease, and the people degenerate into the most brutal stupidity, and Hottentotish ignorance.

The justness of this remark is so much confirmed by the daily experience of every one of us, that very little needs be said here in proof of it. No person can be insensible of the difference between a man who hath refined his behaviour by having seen the world, and polished his conversation, by having an intercourse with a great number of his fellow creatures, and one who hath never seen any or

but very few, besides those he was brought up with; especially, if they have laboured under the same disadvantage with himself, in being confined to the conversation of their neighbours, and partners in the same profession. The one will be docile, conversible, and tractable; the other, obdurate, untractable, and more like a bear in a human shape, than a man.

It becomes, therefore, the Legislature of every nation, as they value their Subjects, or their own honour, as they would wish to reign over men, rather than a set of beings little removed from brutes, to encourage among them that Commerce, and free intercourse with other nations; which

only can be the foundation of all politeness, liberal arts, and in short, of every thing which distinguishes a civilized nation, from one that is merely savage.

Neither is Commerce only valuable, on account of being the foundation of those things. It is also the grand source of wealth and affluence of every kind, nor do we hear of any kingdom which ever became respectable, or agreeable, in any respect, where Trade did not flourish in some considerable degree; which may be another inducement to those in power, to promote as much as possible, every kind of useful Traffick, either between the different parts of the nation itself, or betwixt that nation and others.

That mankind have been designed, by the great Author of nature, to have a commercial intercourse with one another, is evident from the different productions of the different parts of the world. We see one part of the Earth abounding with what another is totally destitute of, which it must still be, unless brought thither by some who make it their business so to do; and who certainly have a right to that wealth and honour, which commonly reward those who assiduously apply themselves to the service of mankind in this manner.

But it is needless, one should think, to descant upon the usefulness of commerce, among a people who may

be justly said to hold the first place in the commercial world. It would be so indeed, did we observe all the branches of it cultivated with the necessary care, or were some of them cultivated by those to whom they properly belong, as well as they are by strangers, to whom, only our own negligence or indolence, can give either a right, or an opportunity of so doing.

The neglect of, or little attendance to our fisheries, is a proof, and a very melancholy one, of the truth of what I have said. Through the neglect of this very branch, thousands, I may say, in the country I am going to treat of, are overwhelmed with misery;

beggary, despondency, and thieving prevail, where nature seems to have designed Commerce, Industry, and Plenty to have their seat.

What a melancholy consideration must it be, to see numbers of our poor countrymen obliged, from mere necessity, to enter into the service of those who take advantage of their necessitous condition, to make Slaves (I use their own expression) of them for one part of the year, leaving them to beg, steal, or starve at home, during the rest of it; for the wages which these poor creatures receive from their employers, are far from being sufficient to maintain their families, during their absence, much less to support them

through that part of the year in which they are totally unemployed? How is it possible to think of our preposterous methods of managing even those things we have in our own power at present, without a mixture of pity with indignation? But why are we so ignorant? Why are we so much inclined to pervert and neglect the use of every natural advantage we have? From having no example set before us,—from having little intercourse with other people, and from being neglected and even oppressed by many of those, whose duty, nay whose interest it is to take care of and protect us.

To such Gentlemen, I address myself, as are sensible of the advantages

of Commerce to mankind in general, and who have already experienced the benefits of it to themselves particularly. To these only I can address myself; and I address them in behalf of my miserable countrymen, not because I would have them relieved at the expence of others, but that those natural advantages, which the Supreme Being hath evidently put in our power, and which are at present totally neglected, may be enjoyed in common by them, and those who are kind enough to teach them how to use these excellent gifts of nature.

If then, there are any, and I hope there are not a few, who can take pleasure in the relief of their fellow

creatures from the utmost distress, and who can be satisfied with an ample prospect of gain, thence arising to themselves, to such I recommend the perusal of the following Treatise ; in which, that I may not be in any respect obscure or unintelligible, I shall 1. give a general account of the country of Orkney. 2. I shall recount the methods used, at present, by the inhabitants, for their subsistence ; showing their wretched situation, with its cause. 3. I shall make some proposals, which, if attended to, seem capable of relieving our distresses, and at the same time giving the most ample prospect of gain to our Benefactors.

The Country described.

THE Islands of Orkney are situated in 59 degrees and an half North Latitude, having on the South, the Pentland Frith, by which they are divided from Scotland; on the west, the Atlantic; and on the North and East, the North Sea and German Ocean. They consist of about 40 Islands, 22 of which are inhabited, the rest, called *Holms*, are used for pasture.

The main Island, called *Pomona*, is of a very irregular shape, and extends in length, about 22 miles from East to West. In breadth, it varies very much; being only an Isthmus of a mile broad, where narrowest; but in

some places extending to 6 or 7 miles.

On the narrowest part of the Island, is situated the Town of Kirkwall, and Parish of St Ola; a populous and pretty large Town, containing about 1500 inhabitants. It is situated in a Bay called Kirkwall Bay, in a very low and marshy ground, in which the Inhabitants would have but an uncomfortable habitation, were it not, that the Tide comes up very near the back of the Town, and effectually carries away the filth, which, in such a situation, behoved to be very noxious.

Kirkwall was lately the Rendezvous for his Majesty's ships, and has one of

the finest Roads in the world, where any number of ships might ride securely, in the worst of weather. There is access to the harbour from the North, East, and West ; and with very little expence, the Isthmus on which the Town stands, might be cut through, and then it would become one of the most excellent situations for Trade, that can be imagined. Perhaps, it hath been this favourable situation, and being the most centrical part of the Island, that hath been the occasion of building the Town where it is ; for its situation in other respects, is not at all eligible.

The Church, formerly the Cathedral of St Magnus, is an elegant Structure,

finished in the Gothic taste. It was built, according to Mr Murdoch Mackenzie, in the year 1130. We had formerly a Castle of very great strength, which was taken and destroyed by Oliver Cromwell, who carried the Guns into England. One of them is still to be seen, which was taken up about 20 years ago, by Capt. Evans, and which was supposed to have fallen off the Catamaran, in shipping. It is an 18 pounder, and when first taken out, was as soft as Cheese. No remains of this Castle are now to be seen; it being entirely pulled down, and a new Prison built with the materials. This is a very neat building, the expence of which was defrayed by James, late Earl of

Morton, out of the Fine, which the Lords of Justiciary laid on the unhappy Sir James Stewart of Barra, for assaulting the Earl.

There is also a very elegant Mason Lodge, and an Assembly Room, neatly finished at the expence of Sir Lawrence Dundass, who generously gave £100 ster. for that purpose. Here we have perhaps as brilliant an appearance of Ladies, as any of an equal number, in Britain, without exception, both as to figure, education, virtue, and every other amiable qualification, which adorns our neighbouring Ladies of a more Southern Latitude, notwithstanding their boasted superior advantages. Neither are our Gentle-

men, especially those who have seen a little of the world, at all inferior, either in mental or bodily qualifications, to any of their Southern neighbours.

Here is likewise a large Granary or Storehouse, with a very fine malt house and kiln. In this house are deposited Sir Lawrence Dundass's Rents, paid in kind, and which now are, and for some years past, have been farmed to merchants in the country, for money prices.

Kirkwall is a Royal Borough, governed by a Provost and four Baillies, with a proper Town-Council. It joins with the Towns of Dornoch, Thain, Dingwall and Wick, in sending

a member to Parliament, having the casting Vote in its turn. Of late, Sir Lawrence Dundass has invested the Town Council with the right of Patronage. Our Church is served by two very worthy Clergymen, of exemplary Piety and virtue.

In Kirkwall is an annual Lammas Fair, held for three days; where a great number of merchants resort from Murray &c. and there is a great Rendezvous of the Country people, who bring in black Cattle for slaughter, coarse and fine Linnen, Stockings, Blankets &c. for sale. Here also is a market for beef, mutton &c. from the month of August to November, but under such absurd regulations,

that the Butchers are allowed to serve their favourites with the best of the meat, under a pretence of its being bespoke ; but were our market put under a proper regulation, we might have a constant weekly one, and a very good one too, in this place. In Kirkwall is also a very good Inn, for the entertainment of strangers, where any Traveller may be very agreeably lodged.

The Inhabitants, in general, are very polite, hospitable, and kind to strangers ; but I am sorry to say, that so little is Industry encouraged in our Country, that no means can be assigned, by which the lower class of people get their bread. By Reason of having

no employment, they must live very wretchedly; they become indolent and lazy to the last degree, insomuch, that rather than raise Cabbage for their own use, they will steal them from others, and instead of being at pains to prepare the Turf, which they have for the mere trouble of cutting up and drying, yet, rather than do so, they will steal it from those who are richer, or more industrious than themselves. Thus they pass their days in wretchedness, in ignorance, and in wickedness.—Every Saturday, which day they are privileged to beg, a Troop of miserable ragged creatures are seen going from door to door, almost numerous enough to plunder the whole Town, were they to exert

themselves against it in an hostile manner, as least, if their valour was in proportion to their distress.

No doubt, this may be thought to imply a Reflection upon the police of our Town; but this I cannot be blamed for, as the above is an undeniable fact, and where facts make reflections, it is incumbent on those, in whose hands the power is lodged, to remove them.

Formerly indeed, there was a Poor-house erected for the maintenance and employment of some of these poor creatures; but it is now entirely disused for that purpose, having been lately used as a shop and warehouse.—As it is

impossible to give a good reason for letting such an useful institution go to ruin, I shall not give any, but content myself with a bare recital of the fact. This Poor-house was in former times, the Parish Church of St. Ola.

One advantage, however, results from this miserable state of our inhabitants, namely, that they are obliged to live very much on Vegetables. Indeed, these, and a small fish called the black Pollock, constitute the whole of their food. By these Vegetables, they are prevented from being exterminated from the face of the Earth, for being situated pretty far to the north, having the Sea continually in

their neighbourhood, and withal so very indolent and inactive, a plentiful use of animal food would soon cut them off, by bringing on the Scurvy, and other putrid disorders; but of these, the Vegetables they eat, from mere necessity, are an happy preventative.

Twelve miles South-west from Kirkwall, lies the Village of Stromness. Here is the principal harbour in the Country, and one of the finest that can be imagined. It is capable of receiving ships of any burden, the water being from three to six fathom and upwards, with a fine oozy bottom. It is able to contain 150 Sail, without the least difficulty. The South-east

part of the harbour is formed by two Islands, the entry into it lying by the southermost, a very high Land forms the Basin on the west, and to the South, the remarkable promontory of Hoy forms one part of the Channel, the high rocky promontories of the main Island forming the other part to the northward. The Harbour is quite free from Rocks and Shelves, its access exceeding easy, and being accessible immediately from the western Ocean, with a proper Tide, it may justly be reckoned a more eligible situation for Trade, to or from America, from Ireland, or the west Coast of England, than any Port in Britain.

The ships in coming in from the

west, must keep the middle Channel, giving the Land on each side, a proper Birth, untill they turn the low point of Land called Ness, when they must luff up, and the mouth of the Harbour opens. Behind, and to the Northeast of the Harbour mouth, commonly called the Back of the Holms, is good anchoring ground for large ships coming either from the Eastward or Westward. This Channel is continued, with outlets Southward into Pentland Frith, by Cantichead, or to the Eastward, by Holm-sound, or Water-sound, and that for ships of any burden.

In the time of war, this Port is of the utmost consequence, as a Rendez-

vous for merchant ships, which are then obliged to avoid coming through the English Channel, on account of the Privateers. But as it is frequently defenceless of ships of war, it would be very proper, to build a Fort on the Southermost of the two Holms, which ly at the entrance of the Harbour, to protect such shipping as might happen to be there; for it is well known, that in 1746, there were here at one time, ships containing private property, to the value of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling and upwards, when Lord Morton's Chamberlain, for the time, was obliged to write for a Convoy; but it is evident, that in the Interval, these ships were protected only by the Ignorance, or distance of

the Enemy; for the smallest Privateer might have taken or destroyed the whole. This shews the propriety of erecting there such a Fort, because whatever ships entered the Harbour, behoved then to come directly under it, that being the deepest Channel.

From this excellent Harbour, only a few Sloops are fitted out by private hands, and employed in the Herring fishery, being sent to the Lewis Islands to the westward.

The Village of Stromness contains about 600 Inhabitants, who, excepting a few Gentlemen, are of the lower class of people, who come thither from the other Parts of the Country, and

subsist chiefly by means of the ships that rendezvous at their Port. To the Crews of these ships, they sell the common necessities of Life, which they bring from the other parts of the country. But, it is evident, that from their Harbour, a much more honourable, as well as a more lucrative Trade might be carried on, for every one of the principal Inhabitants have a Wharf at their own door; and the total neglect of this excellent advantage, shews that they are infected with the same indolence complained of in the Inhabitants of Kirkwall.

I would not however be thought to cast a Reflection upon, or to deprecate my own country, or to blame those

who are really deserving of praise. Some years ago, a large Wharf and Warehouse was finished by Messrs J. G—ns, at a great expence for receiving and unlading ships from America with Rice. At that time, there was a considerable Rice Trade carried on from this place to Holland, and a considerable Revenue accrued from thence, to his Majesty. The owners of the Warehouse also received certificates from the masters of the Vessels, of the quickness of their dispatch from this Port, in order to convince strangers of its being the most eligible situation for that trade. But of late, the seat of that Commerce hath been entirely removed to Cowes on the Isle of Wight; by which, the laudable

intention and efforts of these Gentlemen were not only entirely frustrated, but they themselves were greatly hurt in their circumstances, evil being thus returned them, for the service they had done the public.

A reason, however, is given for this Removal, viz. that between London and the Isle of Wight, is only a small distance, so that the Agents of the Rice ships can send intelligence from London to their correspondents in the Isle of Wight, of the market price of their commodity, in 48 hours; whereas betwixt London and Stromness, a much longer time must necessarily intervene, before such Intelligence could arrive; being obliged to cross the Pentland

Frith, which hath sometimes, though very seldom, been known so boisterous, as to detain the Post for some weeks.

This, I own, was a disadvantage; but it is impossible to find a Spot on Earth, which hath every advantage; and it is pretty evident, that the place which is now made choice of, though indeed it is superior in this respect, hath nevertheless so many disadvantages, that it will at last be found a worse situation than Stromness. For, Wharfage, Warehouses, Service and Provisions, are much cheaper at Stromness, than they can be any where in Britain. The situation is much preferable, either for going to, or returning from America, on account of

being more northerly, and that the ships can more easily get clear of Ireland, not having the disadvantage of passing through the English Channel.

It is evident, that it is a more eligible situation, for a ship, to wait the arrival of the Post in the Harbour of Stromness, than to struggle with contrary winds in the English Channel; for it cannot be expected, that the wind should prove so constant on a Sea half surrounded with Land, as where there is a kind of boundless Ocean, both to the East and West. Hence, the passage from Orkney, is much shorter, as well as more agreeable, than that through the Channel, as the winds, during the Spring

Season, blow almost constantly from the East, continuing in general westerly, during the other Seasons of the year. When all these circumstances are attended to, and properly balanced, I am of opinion, that those concerned in the Rice trade, will find themselves losers by its Removal from Stromness.

Five miles East from Kirkwall, is the Harbour of Deer-sound, capable of containing 300 Sail.—The water is from three to five fathoms, and the Harbour is accessible from the Northward and Eastward, even in the worst of weather, with the greatest safety. The Eastermost part of the passage into the Harbour is bounded by the East part of the main Island; and

after you enter, it is entirely land-locked, so that there can be no danger; let the weather be ever so bad. In this Harbour, the Iceland fleet rendezvous, to take in their common fishers.

In many of the Northern, as well as Southern Islands, are Harbours of the greatest safety, sheltered either by Promontories or Islands; so that we can safely affirm, there is not one unsafe Harbour in the whole country. But as my present design is only, in general, to point out our advantageous situation for trade, I omit the particular description of others.

To the Northeast of the Country is an Island called North-Ronaldshaw,

often fatal to shipping. In 1740, the Suetia of Gottenburgh, Indiaman, valued at half a million sterling, was lost on this Island, and in 1744, the Crown Prince of Denmark, another Indiaman, with thirty chests of treasure on board, was lost on the same. Of late years also, the Author remembers several ships of great value to have been lost there; which shews the great occasion there is for erecting a Light-house upon it. Indeed, it is surprising, that notwithstanding the abundance of small Islands, there is not one Light-house in the whole country of Orkney; which is a great argument, either of the safety of the navigation, or of the negligence of the Inhabitants.

The low situation of this Island, and the rapidity of the Tides which run round it, are the occasion of its being so fatal to shipping ; and this further shews the necessity of erecting the Light-house proposed. Indeed the rapidity of the Tides which run round most of the Islands, require the particular attention of the mariner ; but these have been so accurately described, in Mr Murdoch Mckenzie's draughts, that it is needless to say any thing about them here.

The Climate of Orkney is considerably different from that of Scotland ; being much less warm in Summer, and not so cold in Winter. The neighbourhood of the Sea, in all probability,

hath the occasion of this, and hence, instead of the long continued frosts and snow, which sometimes happen in Britain, we have nothing but violent Rains which are very prejudicial, especially considering the miserable state of Agriculture among us.

Though this over moisture of our Atmosphere must certainly be very prejudicial to the crops, our country nevertheless produces, except in uncommon cases, more Corn than is necessary for the consumpt of the Inhabitants. Considerable quantities of *Bear* are even exported, in some years, most commonly to Cadiz in Spain, or to Lisbon in Portugal, for feeding the mules and asses in these countries.

This species of grain is the most cultivated with us, on account of the quantity of it paid to the Superior, though some Oats are also raised ; but no wheat, barley or pease. Potatoes thrive very well, and are extremely serviceable, both for bringing in the ground, and as food for the poor people. We have no fruit, except some Gooseberries, and a few Apples of the worst kind ; nor are there any Trees in the country, except one Ash, in the neighbourhood of Bishop Reid's Palace, where were lately a few more, but they are now decayed through age.

Our Soil is exceedingly rich and fertile, being most commonly Clay, though in some places we have marle

and Shell Sand, and in others a fine black Earth. We have plenty of Sea weed for manure; however, we seem rather to be losers by using it; for though it gives a Stimulus, by reason of the salt contained in it, the ground is very little deepened thereby, and of consequence, the crops produced from it are very poor and thin, in comparison of what they would be, were any other kind of manure made use of.

About a mile and an half northward from Stromness, is the Loch of Stenness. It is almost seven miles in length from the Sea, with which it communicates, running irregularly in different directions, from a large bridge called the bridge of Weath, up

between the parish of Stenness and Harra on the east side, and that of Sandwich on the west. In this Loch are abundance of Trout, and in all probability, there would be a good Salmon fishery here, were it not that the mouth of the Loch is so much choaked up with Sea weed, that the fish cannot get into it. What confirms this opinion is, that in some Charters belonging to the Gentlemen in the neighbourhood, the Salmon fishery in this Loch, is expressly reserved to the King, as his exclusive right. Here also are several small Holms, where Swans were formerly in use to build, with several other kinds of fowls; but to the eternal disgrace of some of our people, the eggs of the Swans were

meanly taken away, and as is alledged, basely sold to the Southward, for hatching for Gentlemen's ponds. Thus that Royal bird deserted the country, where it could have no protection, even by those whose duty it was, instead of annoying, to have taken all possible care of it. The Author is clearly of opinion, that such Thieves were liable to a prosecution, at the instance of his Majesty, for thus trespassing on his prerogative; for the Swan is protected by Royal authority, and it is no less than felony to steal or kill one of them.

The Hawks of this country are deemed the finest in the world, insomuch, that the King's Falconer sends

a person annually to Orkney, to take them up; commonly in the month of May, when they brood. This creature is a great Enemy to the Grouse, or Moor-game, with which these Islands abound; but there is a generosity, as it were, peculiar to this noble animal, having never been known to prey, either on Chickens, or any other bird, but only on those before mentioned.—From time immemorial, the King's Falconer hath a perquisite of an hen from every house in the country, originally designed for the maintenance of the King's Hawks.

We have no foxes, hares, nor partridges in these Islands. Some years ago, the master of a ship, having

quarrelled with the Inhabitants of Stromness, out of revenge, let loose a fox which he had on board; but he did not succeed in his malicious purpose; for though the creature immediately ran to the hills, at first destroying some sheep, yet, in a short time after, he seems to have died, being no more heard of in the country.—Hares and partridges, we can have none, as we want proper Cover, either of Stubble or Whins, for sheltering them from the Eagles, or other birds of prey.

An account of the natural Curiosities of this country, the Author leaves to an abler hand, his avocations in life having greatly prevented him from giving the application necessary for

such an undertaking, and a minute description of them would be foreign to his present purpose; the two following particulars are inserted on account of their singularity.

In the Island of Enhallow, it is well known, that a Cat will not live. The experiment hath been often tried, by putting these creatures ashore upon this Island, but they always died in Convulsions, in a very short time.— Rats will not live in the Island of Eday, and none of them was ever seen there, in the memory of man.— Some years ago, a ship laden with wheat was wrecked on this Island. The Rats with which the ship swarmed, immediately swam ashore, but all

of them died, in the sight of the Inhabitants.

The Climate of Orkney is productive of such diseases as may naturally be expected to prevail in a country wherein the Atmosphere abounds so much with moisture.—In the Spring and Fall, especially if we have long tracts of easterly winds, or if these Seasons happen to be rainy, nervous and putrid fevers prevail, and are very fatal to the natives. In these cases, the Inhabitants of the north and south Isles, particularly the latter, suffer most severely, being deprived of assistance, on account of their distance from Kirkwall, where our medical Gentlemen reside; and thus, by reason of the

tempestuous weather, these distempers often are left at liberty to exert their full force, which is truly lamentable.— True it is, we have on most of these Islands, a great number of old women Quacks, but they seem rather to be in league with the grim Tyrant, and to have agreed to execute his purpose, than to do any thing contrary to his rule of office.

The Small pox were formerly very fatal, in the natural way ; but of late, the Inhabitants have happily surmounted their prejudices against Inoculation, which is now practised among us with the most unbounded success, many hundreds of children, as well as adults, being saved by

it annually, when this distemper is endemical.

Consumptions, formerly scarce known in this country, have made their appearance of late, and carried off a number of the inhabitants. This seems now to be one of the fixed genera of diseases among us, which would seem to argue a late revolution in our Climate itself. I hope, however, that our Physical Gentlemen, to whom this office properly belongs, will not fail to give a satisfactory reason why a disease, in its nature so different from those to which we are naturally subject, from the constitution of our Atmosphere, should make its appearance among us; and with this

expectation I take my leave of the subject.

Upon the whole, when our Seasons are favourable, especially the Spring and Fall, we are pretty free from those, or any other complaints, and seldom have (Heaven be praised) great need of the assistance of the medical tribe, so that among the multitude of natural advantages with which we are blessed, that inestimable one, of having an healthy Climate, may likewise be numbered.

From the description of our country, I ought now to proceed to an account of the use we make of our natural advantages; but, before I enter upon

this disagreeable part of my work, the Reader, I hope, will excuse me for giving the following description of an animal, which on account of its singularity, cannot fail to be entertaining.

There is a Sea bird peculiar to this country, and to be found no where in Britain, called the Ember-goose. It is fully as large as a tame Goose, and the males have even been seen considerably larger. Many people are greatly at a loss to account for their manner of hatching ; for their feet are placed in such a manner, as makes it impossible for them to stand or walk on land, and they are never seen on shore. The manner of their brooding, however, is shortly this.

About the latter end of May, they all assemble, and set off in a body, all around the coasts, to the distance of 16 or 18 leagues from land, and having deposited their eggs in the hollow part (which nature seems to have appointed for the purpose) betwixt the wing and the body, it there stays, free from molestation, until the warmth of the creature's body answers every end of incubation, and about the end of September, they commonly return, with their young, generally two, which are easily shot, on their first coming.

The male, in the Spring, when it has fully changed its feathers, is one of the most beautiful creatures that can be imagined, having the end of every

feather tipped with white, and all the rest of a fine dark blue. The Legs of this creature are placed in such a situation, that it is utterly impossible for it, as I have already mentioned, for it either to walk, or so much as to stand on the Land ; they are in a line with the *padex*, so that it is plain, they can answer no other purpose than that of swimming, which it does with the greatest rapidity. Neither do its wings answer for the purpose of flying ; for they are so small, that they can scarce be discerned as wings.

It is also remarked, that the Swans and Wild-geese assemble with us in great numbers, in the Spring, when they are going to take their flight,

commonly to the Faro Islands, or to Iceland, for the purpose of brooding. They denounce their Intention by their noise, and altogether set off in different flocks, seemingly under different leaders, and take an annual departure regularly, always making the Brough of Birsay, the westermost point of high Land, their *Cape Farewel*.

From this general account of our country, the Reader must naturally conclude, that we might live in it as comfortably as in any Spot on Earth ; the very contrary however, is a matter of fact ; for no people in the world can be in a state of greater poverty or dejection of Spirits than ourselves. For this, as we cannot put the blame upon

nature, we must necessarily blame ourselves ; in what respects therefore, our methods of management might be altered for the better, I now proceed to observe.

Of the present State of our Country.

IN entering upon this part of my work, I am sorry, that I should be obliged to expose to public inspection, so much of the negligence and misconduct of my countrymen ; but as this very negligence and misconduct hath well nigh proved their ruin already, the present method seems to be the only possible one, by which they can be relieved, either by making them ashamed of their own conduct, or by exciting some persons, possessed of the

necessary qualifications, to attempt some new improvement for our relief. If I am so fortunate as to contribute towards the accomplishment of so desirable an event, I shall think myself amply recompensed for my trouble.

I shall begin my Remarks with considering our general mode of Agriculture, at present, than which, nothing more absurd can possibly be imagined.—Our Climate, as I have already taken notice, is generally moist, in consequence of which, our low grounds, during the Winter and Spring, are either entirely overflowed, or quite marshy. Any person of common sense might conclude it natural for people in such circumstances, to use

every possible method to drain off the superfluous moisture. No such practice prevails among us. Instead of this, we are content to wait, till the advanced Season of the year renders the ground sufficiently dry for tilling. By this piece of negligence, we have always a very late seed time, and of necessity, a late harvest ; and then, we often feel the effects of our misconduct, to our cost ; for violent gusts of wind, which usually happen when our Season breaks, either shake the Corn, or damage it with Sea water.

But this is not all. Though the happy richness of our Soil hath hitherto been able to overbalance all deficiencies in point of management, yet, in the

manuring and tilling of it, we use methods no less absurd, than that already mentioned.—The disadvantage which Sea weed hath naturally, I have already observed, namely, that it contributes nothing, or but very little, towards the deepening of the ground, but, as if this was not sufficient, we generally take care to deprive it of every good quality it possesses. For, except in those places where it can be had every day, instead of being put on the Land, directly, as it comes ashore, it is thrown together in heaps, where it lies exposed to the Sun and Rain, by which means, all the Salts and valuable parts are washed away, and thus it is laid on the ground, devoid of every thing which can render it in any degree useful.

With equal sagacity, do we turn up only about six or eight Inches deep of our excellent Soil, on the pretence of bringing our Crop the sooner to perfection, by its being thus exposed to the warm Rays of the Sun. But this is by no means an equivalent for the disadvantage we must necessarily sustain, by having our grain extremely small, in comparison with that of other countries ; and nothing can contribute more to make a poor Crop, than not giving it sufficient deepness of Earth. The advantage we imagine we can attain to, by following the other method, could easily be had, by sowing earlier in the year ; for an early seed-time will always, accidents excepted, produce an early harvest.

In many places, our Corn fields are overgrown with a kind of weed resembling a marigold, and in others, with a kind of wild mustard, commonly called Runchech, both of which are very pernicious weeds ; and indeed, we are sensible enough of the mischief they do, for great complaints are made of them ; but we are satisfied with making the complaint, expecting perhaps the assistance of some supernatural power, to remove them ; for we never attempt it ourselves, and the appearance of our Corn fields cannot fail to put the beholder in mind of the Vineyard of the Sluggard, mentioned by Solomon.

I must next take notice of our

manner of treating those useful creatures the Horses, which are so necessary to us, for tilling the ground &c. and here, our absurdities are so many, and so glaring, that they certainly deserve the severest animadversion.— I think, it must be evident to every person of common sense, that whoever hath it is in his power to bring up an Horse, will find his account in so doing, rather than in buying him, after he hath been brought up by others. But, though our country is excellently adapted for raising this useful animal, we choose rather to pay twelve or fourteen hundred pounds sterling, annually, for Horses brought from the Highlands, than breed them ourselves. For this we can plead no excuse, as

the Islands of Hoy and Walls, among the South Isles, and Rousay in the North, are exceeding proper pasture for Horses, on account of the many fine Vallies in them, well sheltered, and abounding in excellent grass.

Neither is our method of managing the Horses, after we have got them, less preposterous than that of procuring them; for in the first place, they are initiated to labour, by far too soon. This is an error which never can be retrieved; for the constitution of the creature is thus broken, as long as he lives. —In the next place, we are at no pains to keep them warm in proper Stables. Our Houses which go by that name, are excessively cold; many of them

being built of dry stone, which it is impossible can afford sufficient shelter, either from wind or rain. The poor creatures, after being thus half starved through the night, are turned out to shift for themselves in the day ; and that, commonly into places where nothing is to be had ; for the Grass is mostly eat up by the black cattle, in the time of Harvest. They are therefore obliged to hang about the Houses, for shelter from the rain, which is very frequent in the winter time, till the usual hour of admission ; when they get a little straw, calculated rather to exercise their Jaws, than to afford them any solid nourishment. With such miserable management, it is no wonder that they are subject to

violent Colds, which soon degenerate into the contagious distemper called the Glanders, by which many of them are destroyed. Nor is the practice of giving them large quantities of raw Chaff, less pernicious ; for as this is necessarily mixed with Sand and other pernicious substances, they are, by the use of such food, subjected to the dry Gripes, called among us the Belly-sturdy ; and by these distempers among their Horses, many farmers are utterly ruined, without once suspecting their own Laziness and Folly to be the cause.

If our country is well adapted for raising of Horses, it is still more so, for producing black Cattle ; but we are at

no pains to procure a proper breed ; insomuch, that our Beef, seldom or never exceeds 40 pound weight per Leg. Indeed, the size of our Cattle seems very well adapted to their mode of entertainment ; for our Indolence will not allow us to make any Inclosures, so as to raise Grass for Hay from the Seed. Our Cattle therefore, have no food for one half of the year, except straw, which, so far from contributing to make them strong and vigorous, is scarce sufficient to keep them alive ; and a larger breed of Cattle would undoubtedly perish by such treatment.

But of all our proceedings, our method of making butter is the most remarkable.—By this delicate method,

the butter is made of the milk, as it is drawn from the Cow, without any straining, or endeavouring to take out the Hairs, of which it must always be very ful.. For, as our Cows are of a very small size, one of them can give but a very small quantity of milk, and therefore, a great number of them will be required, in order to produce the quantity of butter paid by the Tenants to their masters, under the name of Debt, and in proportion to the number of Cows, the milk must be the more dirty. It is, however, strained at last, in the making of the butter ; for this detains among it, all the hairs, and other impurities of the milk, which now becomes clean enough for the use of the common people ; and in this fine

situation, is our butter sold, for laying sheep, and greasing Coach wheels, to the everlasting disgrace of our country.

No part of Scotland can boast of equal advantages with the Orkney Islands, for the producing of sheep; and in our breed of them, we certainly might excel, did we manage them with any degree of prudence, or of common sense; but, for our conduct with regard to them, I am utterly at a loss to give any reason at all. Our other blunders may be well enough accounted for, from a principle of Indolence, but here, in some respects we seem industriously active in doing mischief.

In the first place, our country being

very open, with but few Inclosures, the sheep naturally seek the Corn for their subsistence ; to keep them from it, we wisely employ dogs, rather than shepherds, by which means, many of these poor creatures are often wounded, and torn in pieces, or much hurt by being overdriven ; the young are left a prey to Eagles, Crows, and wandering dogs, which prey upon them, and destroy great numbers. No care is taken to separate the males from the females, when the latter are heavy with young ; in short, our sheep are by this extraordinary method of management, left a prey to every enemy, which can destroy and devour such an helpless race of creatures.

But of all others, the most extraordinary practice is, at the sheep shearing (except in very few places of the country) to take them with dogs, bind them, and then instead of shearing, to *pull* the wool of them. In doing this, it is evident to common sense, that the quality of the wool itself must be impaired, besides the mischief that is done to the sheep, by that violent method of taking them. But besides this, as they must all be bound, one by one, and laid in different places till the whole are collected together, there is danger of these places being forgot, and thus the creature perishes miserably, being unable to procure subsistence for itself.

This last consideration, which must be shocking to the humanity of every one who thinks of it, is no doubt, a sufficient Reason for the employment of shepherds ; but the necessity of this is still further seen, or rather felt, from the abundance of Ravens, Eagles &c. which prey upon the Lambs in their helpless state.—It is also peculiarly unfortunate, that the Season wherein these noxious creatures brood, coincides exactly with that in which the Ews bring forth their young, which more and more, shews the necessity of taking some means for their defence, which can be done in no other way, than that of employing shepherds ; for, by the unerring law of Instinct, these rapacious birds know this to be the

fittest opportunity of attacking and making a prey of these Emblems of Innocence.

The methods of attack used by these creatures, are singular. I can aver it, from my own observation, that the Ravens often seize the young Innocents in their Talons, dropping them from a great heighth, upon the Rocks on the shore ; by which they are instantly destroyed, the attack being so sudden, that the intuitive mode of preservation, from the parent animal was totally eluded, and the Lamb being thus incapable of struggling, the Raven had no difficulty in carrying it to its nest.

The Eagles follow the same method of preying upon them, only it is remarkable, and averred as a truth, that an Eagle will not take or destroy either sheep, poultry, or Geese, within 2 or 3 miles of its own nest ; as if, by this means, they intended to purchase peace from the Inhabitants, and induce them not to give them any disturbance in their Season of brooding, or at other times.

The Eagles feed also on fish, which they have abundance of opportunities of catching, especially the Holybut. This fish sometimes comes up to the surface of the water, which, by the by, is greatly out of his Sphere of appointment. The Eagle greedily seizes the

opportunity, and strikes his Talons in the creature, and as the fish endeavours instantly to go down, resists the force of its struggle, untill the fish is totally deprived of life; which thus falls a Victim, fulfilling the old proverb, *Ne Sutor ultra Crepidam.*

The Reader may perhaps be surprised, that a fish which nature hath appointed to keep the bottom, for the Holybut cannot rise without difficulty, should move out of the Sphere appointed him by nature; and indeed, it is not easily said why he does so, but it is an undoubted fact, that if a Solon Goose, Gennet, or any other fowl which preys on fish, hovers above the surface of the water, the fishes will

immediately come to the Top. This is the Reason why the Gennets, Sea Gulls and other birds flutter so much about the surface of the Sea; for these creatures watch their opportunity, and as soon as they observe the fish on the surface, they immediately dart down and seize them. This seems to be a species of Fascination similar to that of the Rattlesnake for both of which, I leave the naturalists to account in a rational manner.

Some years ago, an Eagle and an Holybut were taken up by one of the Shetland fishing boats. The Eagle had fixed his Talons in the fish, without being able to bring him ashore, and being thus detained on the water,

and his strength entirely exhausted, he died, soon after being brought on board. Indeed, this creature, when once it makes the attack, must either carry off its prey, or perish by its own Temerity. For, when it hath fixed its Talons in this fish (which is the strongest of the finny tribe, the various Cetaceous species excepted) there is no possibility of disengaging them again at pleasure ; for, being crooked, they require much less force to penetrate into the creature's body, than to pull them out ; and it is the nature of this bird, as well as of all others, to contract its Talons the more closely, the more it is disturbed, when its flight is any way impeded. The Eagle, therefore, is obliged, either to fly to its

nest, if in the brooding Season or to the first Rock where it can feed with safety to itself.

This creature on account of its being so generally obnoxious, is hunted by all the people in these Islands, and a premium is established by ancient custom of a hen given to the person who destroys it, out of every house in the Island or Parish, to which such person belongs ; and this, upon producing the head and feet of the bird so destroyed, to the Sheriff of the County.

Before I leave the description of this destructive creature, I cannot omit taking notice of one instance of its

behaviour, by way of contrast to the general account of its complaisance, as given above.—A Clergyman of uncommon worth and veracity, while he taught the Children of a neighbouring Gentleman, before he entered into orders, happened to shoot at, and wound one of these birds, by breaking the pinion of one of its wings, without injuring it in any other manner. He and some of his scholars, with the help of some Country people, brought it home to the Manor or dwelling house, leaving it in the Area, or common passage. It seemed very sullen, refused food, and in a short time, was apparently dead, untill night, when it got up, and hopped away into the hills. When the Reverend Gentle-

man looked for his Eagle in the morning, it was gone, and no tidings were heard of it, for several days ; untill a boy, coming over the hills express, found the creature sitting on a bank, with the carcases of a number of Lambs, destroyed by it, lying scattered up and down, without one of them being used for its food, or the bodies in the least torn. The boy killed the Eagle, and told the Story, as now related.

It would appear from this account, that this Eagle avenged, or thought to avenge itself, upon the person who had hurt it, by the slaughter of these Innocents ; just as we endeavour to hurt those who aggrieve us, by attack-

ing or destroying their property.—Thus, the creature, seemingly conscious of the impossibility of repairing the injury done to itself, was determined to spend the remainder of its life, in doing as much injury to the property of mankind as possible ; and, like *Zanga* in the Tragedy “die, satiated with Revenge.”.

The Reader will readily excuse the manner of relating the above story ; but the fact is certain and well vouched.—There are various species of these birds in the country, under the general name of Eagles, the largest of which is called the Ern. These build commonly in high inaccessible Rocks. The smaller kinds build sometimes in

these Rocks, and sometimes in Heaths. When they have young, and their nests are easily come at, it is a happy discovery to the people in the neighbourhood, who find always plenty of fish and flesh of different kinds, lying promiscuously around the young in the nest, much more than they can devour; so it would seem, that the overplus had the happy effect to the Eagles, of bribing the discoverers into secrecy, and by this daily supply, prevent the destruction of the parent animal, or of the young, untill fully able to fly, and provide for themselves.

It is further certain, that there never are more than one pair of that kind called Erns, in the different parts of

the Country where they brood, and that, from time immemorial. This is accounted for as follows.—As soon as the young are able to provide for themselves, the old ones entice them from place to place, and from Island to Island, which ly in the course of their intended departure. They then fly over to the Continent, where they leave them in the dead of the night, to shift for themselves. The old ones return to their former place of abode, and the young, being thus left destitute, ignorant of the way to return, and their former means of subsistence abstracted, necessity obliges to search for their food, and to follow the other unerring dictates of nature.

It may be further observed, of this sagacious animal, that in case either of them are destroyed by the Country people, the surviving one will absent itself for some time, from its usual haunt, and fly to a distant Country ; from whence it will return, with a mate, in lieu of the one so destroyed. This is an undoubted fact, and hath been often remarked. The female is almost twice as big as the male, as indeed are all those of the voracious tribe of birds.

This bird is fearless in attacking its prey, frequently killing sheep, when pressed by hunger ; an instance of which, out of many that might be given, shall suffice at present.—Some

Years ago, a sheep happened to be asleep in a hot Summer day, in the Island called Stronsay, among some Heath, the roots of which were very thick and strong. The Eagle, being thus pressed, resolved to attack the harmless creature ; and that it might do so to greater advantage, struck one of its Talons into the Roots of the Heath, and the other into the back of the sheep, which, when the creature felt in its body, it arose with a sudden spring, and tore the bird asunder ; the greatest part of its body sticking to the sheep, and the thigh and leg, left as before noticed. The sheep was observed, by some of the Inhabitants, had the Talons taken out of its back, and was afterwards cured.

Neither do the Eagles always content themselves with attacking the Lambs, sheep, &c. but will sometimes, though rarely, set upon, and carry away young children. An instance of this happened some years ago, in the Parish of Deerness ; where a woman having left her Child at the side of a sheaf of Corn, in harvest time, an Eagle carried it to its nest in a neighbouring Rock. The woman, missing her Child, immediately alarmed her neighbours, who coming with all expedition to the nest, found the Infant lying there unhurt.

These ravenous birds will attack one another, and fight very fiercely, at some particular times. In Stronsay,

not many years ago, two Eagles, having attacked each other in the air, and each one fixed his Talons in his adversary, neither of them were able to disengage themselves, and in this condition, they both fell to the ground; where they were killed by the Country people, with their flails. The largest of these birds, are between 8 and 9 feet from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other, when the wings are extended.

This account of the ravenous nature and Strength of the Eagles, may give us some Idea of the mischief they do among our sheep, when in their most helpless state. I have only one observation more to make concerning

them, which is, that when the Claws are once thoroughly fixed into the body of any creature, the Eagle must eat them out, before she can disengage herself; so that there is no possibility of their prey escaping with life, when once it is taken. Considering therefore, the way in which our sheep are exposed, to these and other enemies, and the manner of treating them ourselves, it is rather a matter of surprize, that our breed of them is not totally exterminated, than that they are not more numerous, or of a better kind. If we also take into consideration, the wretched state of agriculture, with the other particulars which I have pointed out, the Reader cannot be surprized at our poverty, but must rather be sur-

prized at our being able to subsist at all.

What must likewise contribute very much to keep us in our present wretched state of poverty, is the payment of the fieu duties *in kind*, to the Superior ; for, by this means we are obliged to give our attention more to the raising of *Bear &c.* than to the cultivation of other kinds of more useful grain, or to the raising of black Cattle, which ought to be our principal object, as the Return from them is the most certain.

The Country people subsist, many of them at least, by their more capital Farms ; and those near the Sea, by the small Cotteries on the different

Islands. These last, have commonly a Cow's grazing, Potatoe ground, and the advantage of catching fish, commonly small Cole-fish. But as it is impossible, that all the Inhabitants of any Country can subsist by means of agriculture, and the wretched state of it among us, makes it capable of subsisting only a part of what it might otherwise do, for this Reason, it must naturally be expected, that many of our men will leave our Country, never to return. Our Situation naturally inclines us to the Sea, and therefore, most of our male emigrants are employed as Sailors, in different services. In the course of last war, no fewer than 12,000 from Orkney and Shetland, were employed in the service of

his Majesty, and made as good Sailors, as any in the navy. But our people have an aversion to the land-service, as not suiting their natural Genius, which must always incline them to the Sea, being bred to it from their infancy.

By reason of this constant drain of the male part of our Inhabitants, we must necessarily have a much greater number of women than men among us, who being destitute of any kind of employment, must ly as an useless burden on the country ; and, what is still worse, many of them must likewise be destitute of husbands, by which means they degenerate into that wretched species of beings called Old maids, so that to all our other evils, that of being

pestered with these female *Grimalkins* is likewise added.

Formerly, the Royal Herring fishery was the means of subsisting several hundreds, both of men and women ; but that being dropt, by reason of the expiration of the Royal Charter, they are now thrown as an useless burden on the country, without a possibility of their procuring subsistence for themselves or families. Of consequence, they are either obliged to leave the country, or to beg, steal, or starve at home.

Numbers of poor old men and women, have been, and still are employed in manufacturing Kelp,

which is of an exceedingly good quality, and must always be preferable to that made in any part of Britain, there being no mixture of fresh water with our Seas. This hath likewise been greatly neglected in some places, and abused in others, by mixing it with Sand, and other trash, so that not near the number are subsisted in this way that might be so.

Great numbers of young, as well as old women through the Country, were formerly employed in spinning; but this too is gone, by reason of great numbers becoming adventurers in that way, and not being so exact, either in the reel or tell of it, as they ought to have been; so that a large quantity of

it was seized in Edinburgh, and would have been condemned, had it not been for the interest of a certain Gentleman. This hath been a very heavy loss to the whole Country; for our women, by their industrious application in this way, not only cloathed and maintained themselves in a state of independence, but also, had often the sense of filial duty, sufficient to make them pay their father's debt to his master; whereby, many aged parents were relieved from this annual burden, and were at liberty to enjoy themselves in ease and retirement, the great comforts of old age; but now, the greatest misery must attend both them, and their Children who were wont to support them, which must surely be a

most affecting consideration, to every humane person.

Thus we seem to be in a state, the most dismal that can be imagined ; the bulk of our inhabitants being reduced to extreme misery, without a possibility of relieving themselves, by any means they can use. An instance of this is, that such as are employed in the Iceland fishery, are obliged to work for four months in the year, for thirty shillings ; which certainly shews the greatest distress at home, or it cannot be supposed, that they would leave the Country, to work for such wages.

But, if this is the most fortunate Season of the year for these poor

creatures, what must become of them during the rest of it? How are they to subsist themselves, their wives or their children, when totally destitute of every kind of employment? Is it any wonder to find them beggars, nay, is it a wonder to find them Thieves, or sunk into the most desperate and Savage ignorance of every thing that can be called human? Surely, if there is such a thing as distress upon Earth, a man in the situation of these poor creatures, must feel it. Certainly, if ever it was commendable to undertake the improvement of any country, it is that of Orkney. Neither is the undertaking difficult; but though it were a labour fit only to be undertaken by an Hercules, it surely

would be worthy of any person to attempt it, and though one should fail in the attempt, he would shew himself a worthy member of Society, and one who deserved well of the public, as having the good of his fellow creatures at heart.

A proposal hath indeed been made to Government, for rendering our country more useful to the Empire of Great Britain, by making it the centre of the herring, white, and whale fisheries, and we hope that this proposal will be accepted; but whether it is, or is not, it cannot supersede those improvements, which individuals among ourselves might easily execute. The advantages we derive from our situa-

tion, are certainly very singular, and never can be enough insisted on. We might become the very centre of trade, to all the northern kingdoms in Europe; for, being seated in the middle between the Shetland and the Western Islands, Vessels from our country might run down with equal facility, to the East or West side of Great Britain. From the many safe and convenient Harbours, with which our country abounds, it is most excellently adapted for bringing commodities from foreign countries, to increase the number of our materials for manufactures; and by taking proper care, in a few years, our Islands might become the seat of a variety of manufactures, and thereby be enabled to carry on an

extensive and beneficial foreign trade, by which we would soon be made to forget our present melancholy situation.

After having set forth the distress of our Country, in such strong terms, and charged the Inhabitants with such shameful and inexcuseable Indolence, it would be unpardonable, not to make proper mention of those Gentlemen, who have undertaken, and in part executed some considerable Improvements among us.

Here, I should be doing injustice to the merit of our superior, Sir Lawrence Dundass, did I omit mentioning the generous offer he made, of no less

a sum than ten thousand pounds sterling, to the Gentlemen of the Country, to be laid out by them in what Improvements they pleased. I wish I, could say, that this generous offer had met with a proper return from them ; but, with regret I must add, that this was refused, and for no other reason, than that he desired heritable security for his money ! Surely, had these Gentlemen been in Sir Lawrence's place, they would have desired a security of the same kind. They may plead as an excuse, that if the Schemes had failed, in which they engaged themselves, their Estates must have suffered for it. This argument would be of force, had the Country been in any tolerable state of improve-

ment, so that a doubt could have arisen, whether more could be made, but where the deficiencies are so glaring, and the connection between making the Improvements, and Gain to the Improver, are as evident, as to one who sows a waste piece of ground with grain, I cannot see how they can be excused ; for they cannot say, that they had any reason to be afraid of being distressed by Sir Lawrence, his generous offer having shewn, that his disposition was not to distress, but to relieve.

With the same generosity of disposition, Sir Lawrence hath given an hundred pounds sterling, for the improvement of our Roads, which are

now excellent, especially those from Kirkwall to Stromness and Holm ; the last of which is our Post Road to the Ferry. The Gentlemen of the Country likewise contributed very largely towards purchasing the utensils necessary for carrying it on, and are still going on with it ; so that I have not the mortification to say the same thing of every individual in our Country.

Our present Sheriff P— G—m Esqr. hath exerted himself in a very becoming and extraordinary manner, for the relief of those to whom he hath it in his power to be of service. —So far is this Gentleman from looking with an eye of indifference on the

indolent and inactive state of his Countrymen, that he is at pains to procure annually, a quantity of flax seed, which he gives *gratis* to his Tenants, obliges them to sow, spin, and make the yarn into Cloth. This Cloth, he takes from them in payment of their Rent. Thus they are obliged to be industrious, and by this means they are enabled to subsist comfortably, without feeling the least inconvenience, or burden from the payment of their Rent. The same Gentleman hath also made many and very great improvements, on his estate in the Parish of Holm, both by inclosing, and otherwise, for which he certainly deserves the applause of every good man.

P—H—n of Graemsay; D—G—t, and several other Gentlemen, have also shewed an inclination to better their Country, by making some improvements, and it were greatly to be wished, that others would follow their laudable example. The two last mentioned Gentlemen, particularly distinguished themselves, about the amendment of the Roads, and the Country owes great part of that Improvement to them.

Around the Town of Kirkwall, are several very good Inclosures of stone, chiefly by A—w R—s Esqr. Collector of his Majesty's Customs, and Chamberlain to Sir Lawrence Dundass. He has been at very great expence with

this, as well as with every other mode of improvement in Agriculture, and seems not only to be a good Theorist, but as good a practical Farmer as any in the Country.

The methods of Improving our Country.

WHEN I come to speak of the particular Improvements of which our Country is capable, I cannot omit that most natural and obvious one, namely, our application to fisheries of all kinds. For these, we are naturally adapted, above all others, and this is an improvement of the utmost importance, not only to ourselves, as that for which we are peculiarly fitted, but most deserving the attention of

Government. For, as almost all our poor people are bred to the Sea, the employing them at home, in a way to which they have been accustomed, must make our Islands an excellent nursery for Seamen, and of how much importance these are to Britain, I need not mention. We hope therefore, that the proposal which hath been already made to Government, will be seconded by our Superior, and that with his usual patriotic and public Spirit, he will take into consideration some of the following Schemes.

The Whale-fishery is of all others the most important, and what ought to be attended to, in the most particular manner; nevertheless, it must

be acknowledged, that notwithstanding the great bounty given by Government, to encourage such undertakings, those who have hitherto undertaken it, have not much found their account in so doing. The superior skill of the Dutch is thought to give them an advantage over us in this fishery; but here I think we undervalue ourselves without any reason. Certainly, we have as good Sailors as the Hollanders. They can navigate their ships as well, and row their boats with equal, if not superior swiftness. The only superiority they can boast of then, must be in striking the Whales with the Harpoon. Their superiority in Dulness, might perhaps have formerly given them some little advantage

in this respect, but since the new invented method of discharging the Harpoon from a kind of Swivel, this Superiority must have subsided, as a Whale may be struck in this way, at a much greater distance, than by throwing it from the hand.

One disadvantage, however, which we certainly labour under, is the expence of fitting out our ships. To lessen this, in some measure, I would propose the fitting out and manning some ships entirely from Orkney. The advantage of this would be, in the first place, that some distance would be saved, by reason of our northerly situation. This indeed is a trifle, but trifles always have their

weight, and in some cases, produce very great effects. In the next place, our people from Orkney, would be glad to go for less wages, than those employed just now; and whatever was saved in this way, behoved to be looked upon as clear gain to the employers. Add to this, that those who are bred in Orkney, would be content with much coarser fare; than those that are employed at present; but of this I cannot pretend to make a calculation, though it is evident at first sight, that the saving must be very considerable.

Another very great advantage which must accrue to those who choose to undertake this fishery is, that by

reason of our convenient situation, a voyage might be made into the East, for Wood, Staves, Hemp or Flax, while the Blubber was boiling into Oil in Orkney. In the Island called the Pan-hope of Flota, belonging to Sir Lawrence Dundass, in the Southerly Isles, is one of the finest Harbours in the world; accessible immediately from the Pentland Frith, where the ships might land their Blubber with the greatest safety, and close to the very Harbour, is a species of Turf, called Yarfa, of the most excellent quality, by which the Oil might be boiled at a very small expence, considering that the Fewel would cost little or nothing, in comparison of Coals, and the Servants wages there,

are vastly inferior to what they are in Britain. In this Harbour, the ships from Petersburg were ordered to perform quarantine. At Langhope of Walls, belonging to Mr Moodie of Melsetter, are equal conveniences with the other, for any purpose of this kind.

In Ware-sound, in the north Isles, are equal conveniences for this purpose, having the Island of Rousay in the neighbourhood, where there are inexhaustible quantities of Turf, for boiling the Oil, and where the ships might ly in the greatest safety. In the Isle of Eday is an excellent Harbour called Calf sound, quite secure and safe, having the same advantages

with the others ; so that there could not be the smallest doubt of having every thing relating to this fishery done in Orkney, as well, more expeditiously, and much cheaper, than any where in Britain. Here also a deposit might be made of the Oil, as also of the Wood, Flax, Hemp &c. untill a proper market was found for them ; or the two last might employ a vast number of our Hands who are now entirely idle, in a manufacture which I shall mention afterwards.

For the herring fishery, we are incomparably well adapted, as having people exceedingly well skilled in the carrying it on. We might have our nets made within ourselves ; and there are many

shipmasters now residing in our Country, that were formerly Buss masters in the late Herring Buss fishery, and likewise the Coopers, Gutsters &c. that were employed in it for 20 years.

The Newfoundland fishery ought also to be an object of our attention, and this the more particularly, as we might have by that means an opportunity of disposing of great quantities of coarse Linen, stockings and a coarse kind of cloth called Scowrings, which would be an encouragement to our people to manufacture, as being sure of a market.

A Lobster fishing might also be carried on with great success, vast

quantities of the finest Lobsters abounding all round the Country. A proposal was lately made to Mr Kiddermaster, the great fishmonger at London, to deliver him annually in Orkney, 95,000 Lobsters at 1d. each. But this he did not accept, as it hath been found by experience, that these fish which are caught in shallow water, and a strong Tide, are so exceedingly rich, that they cannot bear confinement, or the brackish water on the coast of England ; and therefore, in long voyages, vast numbers of them die, and become good for nothing. This fishery hath indeed been carried on from Orkney, untill last year ; but, though this could not be done in the way formerly attempted, it would be

quite different case, were we to send them up to London ourselves ; because then, we could keep them alive, in our Lobster chests, as long as we please, and then send them to London, at a proper opportunity.

A very strong reason for establishing these fisheries is that it would be a means of employing, in a manner, all our useless and idle hands. There is no person so totally useless and worn out with age, as not to be able to do something in the manufacture of white Rope, fishing lines, Snouds, Nets, or Sail cloth. All these, we certainly have an excellent opportunity of manufacturing, were it for no other reason, than the great numbers in our

Country, that are totally unemployed, and every one of these things we would have occasion for, in the different fisheries. Were we to have no demand for these things, except from our own fishers, the consumpt must be considerable enough to employ a good number of hands, but it is certain, that the Shetland fishers, annually receive from Hamburg, fishing lines to the value of £800 or 1000 which we could supply them with at a much cheaper rate, exclusive of the duty they are obliged to pay. The Sail cloth manufacture, we could likewise manage very easily, as there is a stream of water which runs through the Town of Kirkwall, considerable enough to turn two mills,

which would be sufficient to supply all the machinery requisite for that manufacture.

I have already taken notice of the encouragement which the Newfoundland fishery would be to our manufactures, and indeed, very few words will be necessary to shew, that there is such a connection between these fisheries, and the manufactures which are most calculated for us, that the establishment of them would at once give, as it were, a new life and Spirit to the whole Country.

Another improvement, something allied to the fisheries, might be easily made as follows.—The Horie Goose,

so called by the Inhabitants of these Islands, are here in the greatest numbers, and follow the same Rules with other birds of the Goose-kind, of which this is one.—It comes to us in the fall, and stays with us all the Winter and Spring, when it emigrates to the northward, to fulfill the dictates of nature. This is what is called the Brant Goose in England and Ireland, where they are also in the greatest numbers. They commonly feed on low flat Sands and Clay, where there grows a species of long Grass upon the surface. The Author avers, that he has seen in the north of Ireland, some hundreds of them taken in one night, in the following manner. At low Sea Tide, there are Poles stuck in

the Sands, longer than the depth of the water at full Sea, upon which are hung nets made with a large mesh on purpose, with the lower end hanging loose in the water, and pretty deep, when the creature in swimming backwards and forwards in the night time, especially in moonlight, is easily entangled and taken. These Poles and nets are set in different directions, to take them the more readily, whatever way they come or go. Ducks are also taken by the same means, but rarely. In the shore of the Harbour of Deer-sound, formerly described, and the whole of the head of that Bay, many thousands of these creatures might be taken ; for this Bay is of a very great extent. It must be remarked, that these creatures

observe the Course of the winds, always swimming along a windward shore, which must be attended to by those who mean to catch them. If this method was practised with success, there should be no shooting at them, as this would frighten them, and make the taking of them more difficult. They have very fine feathers, and are the most delicious eating, commonly selling at Kirkwall, at 4d. or 6d. each, when shot.

Were we to give proper attention to those things which may even be thought trifling and of little importance, our Inhabitants would soon become more industrious, and of consequence, in a short time, their present

misery would begin to abate. This method of catching the Brant or Horie Geese, is by no means difficult, and might be put in execution by private persons, at very little expence; and even the attempting of this would be highly commendable.

Here we have also a Bird called by the natives the Lyar, by the English Puffin. This creature burrows in holes among stones, like a Rabbit, and the young are the most delicious eating that can be supposed. They are almost one entire body of fat, and the Season when taken, being commonly in the beginning or middle of August, they are covered over with down, so that a stranger, upon viewing them,

would scarce know their head from their tail.

For these forty or fifty years past, if not more, the Hudson's Bay fleet, consisting of 4 Sail in time of war, and 3 Sail in time of peace, always rendezvous in these Islands, commonly at Stromness, not only for the convenience of a westerly bound Harbour, but of recruiting men, for their different Settlements in that Region. This hath been of great service to the Country in general, as they encouraged not only our Tradesmen, such as Joiners, and other handicraftmen, but also common Labourers, to whom they gave the highest wages, which after their respective date of stay in the

Country, being commonly four years at a time (but if they chose to stay longer they might do so) thus, from their being plentifully supplied with every necessary, from the excellent appointment of the Directors of that exclusive trade, and their having no opportunity of spending any of their wages, they commonly returned to their Country, with large Sums of money, which enabled them to take, and to stock capital Farms, by which they lived comfortably the Remainder of their days.

These ships commonly come to Stromness in June and carry out the men, as before mentioned, but now they return through the English

Channel, i.e. in peaceable times. Formerly they returned through these Islands, in peace as well as in war, when they commonly had a Convoy ready for them. But lately, for some reasons given by the Directors they are obliged to return in the above-mentioned way. We have been more obliged to this branch of business, for taking our fishermen, than to all the petty fishers that come in our way.

As Salt is an article essentially necessary to the curing of fish, it would be a kind of absurdity to think of establishing fisheries, and bringing Salt from a different Kingdom; especially as we have the finest opportunities of making it, from the great

strength of our Salt water, and the cheapness of our fewel. About a Century ago, Lord Carrick had a great number of Salt Pans, on the Calf Island of Eday, and they have been since in use, though now gone to Ruin ; but certainly, the neglect of them, though for ever so long a time, can be no reason for the continuance of it any longer. It is evident, that Salt can be made in Orkney, to much greater advantage than at Shields, Borrowstounness, or any other place in Scotland or England, where the Sea water is necessarily less strong than with us.

With regard to the improvements that may be made in Agriculture, I

must in the first place observe, to the Gentlemen of the landed Interest, that the only sure way of acting for their own advantage, is by promoting the welfare and happiness of their Tenants. It is impossible that they can be happy, if they are not industrious; and those who have already been so much dispirited by poverty, and sunk in sloth and ignorance, never will be industrious, or exert themselves in any degree, untill they see some prospect of attaining to a certain independence, as the reward of their Industry. While their Leases are so short, as they just now are, it is an utter inconsistency to suppose, that the Tenants will apply themselves to any thing; and unless this Bar is taken out of the

way of their Industry, I cannot see a reasonable foundation of hope, for any change in their behaviour. I would therefore propose the granting of long leases, the shortest for 19 years ; and that the proprietors should make an agreement among themselves, not to take a Grassum, under a penalty. Instead of this, let the proprietor choose one good man, and the tenant another, who shall be deemed competent Judges of the Genus or Quality of the Improvements to be finished periodically, every ten years of the tenant's tack ; and in case these improvements are not finished agreeable to the tenor of the lease, the tenant should forfeit it, and have no more benefit from it.

Thus the tenants, from the length of their leases, would go chearfully to work, on these lucrative plans of improvement, where they could evidently see a certain prospect of gain ; and by this means, they would flourish, and easily pay their Rent, affording to themselves, a comfortable subsistence at the same time, and at last, raise themselves to a state of happy independency. Every service, and every other matter capable of diverting the tenant's attention from the principal object, ought to be abolished, for this might destroy the very effect proposed. Thus, at the accomplishment of the above-mentioned term, the Gentlemen would have Estates of four times their

present value, besides the pleasure of making thousands happy.

Further, the Gentlemen would find it their Interest, to take a regular survey of their Estates, and such places as are not under culture, or where the Farms are very small, the latter ought to be turned into the property of the principal farms, the most contiguous proposed to be improved as above; and proper planks of ground, never before cultivated, might be bestowed on those Cottars, who would otherwise be destitute. If they were not able to build houses, or to inclose themselves agreeable to the proposed plan, the landed Gentlemen would find their account in assisting them as

far as was necessary, as the principal advantage would accrue to themselves in the end. I would also propose, that these Cottars should have at least seven or eight years rent free, after their possessing, or inhabiting their Cottaries. For accomplishing of this desirable purpose, a division of the common lands, of which we have a great deal, would be extremely proper.

The above plan must evidently be the only rational method of making a thorough Improvement in our Agriculture ; but, without the concurrence of the Gentlemen of the landed Interest, such a plan cannot be accomplished ; and consequently, unless they shall

take the above plan, or some one similar, into consideration, our country, instead of being bettered in any degree, must continue to go on from bad to worse.

But, though any important Revolution in our state of Agriculture cannot be expected, without adopting this method, yet, some Improvements are in the power of every individual who hath a farm, one of the most considerable of which is, to labour with oxen instead of horses. Many circumstances might induce us to follow this salutary method. An ox could be bought at a third part of the price of a horse, and when the latter are worn out, and unable to labour any more, they might

then be fattened for slaughter, whereas a horse in these circumstances, is good for nothing, except his skin. Add to this, that an ox does not require so much food as a horse, is less liable to diseases, and requires not near so much care, which surely are sufficient reasons for preferring the one to the other, especially as our method of managing horses is so very indifferent.

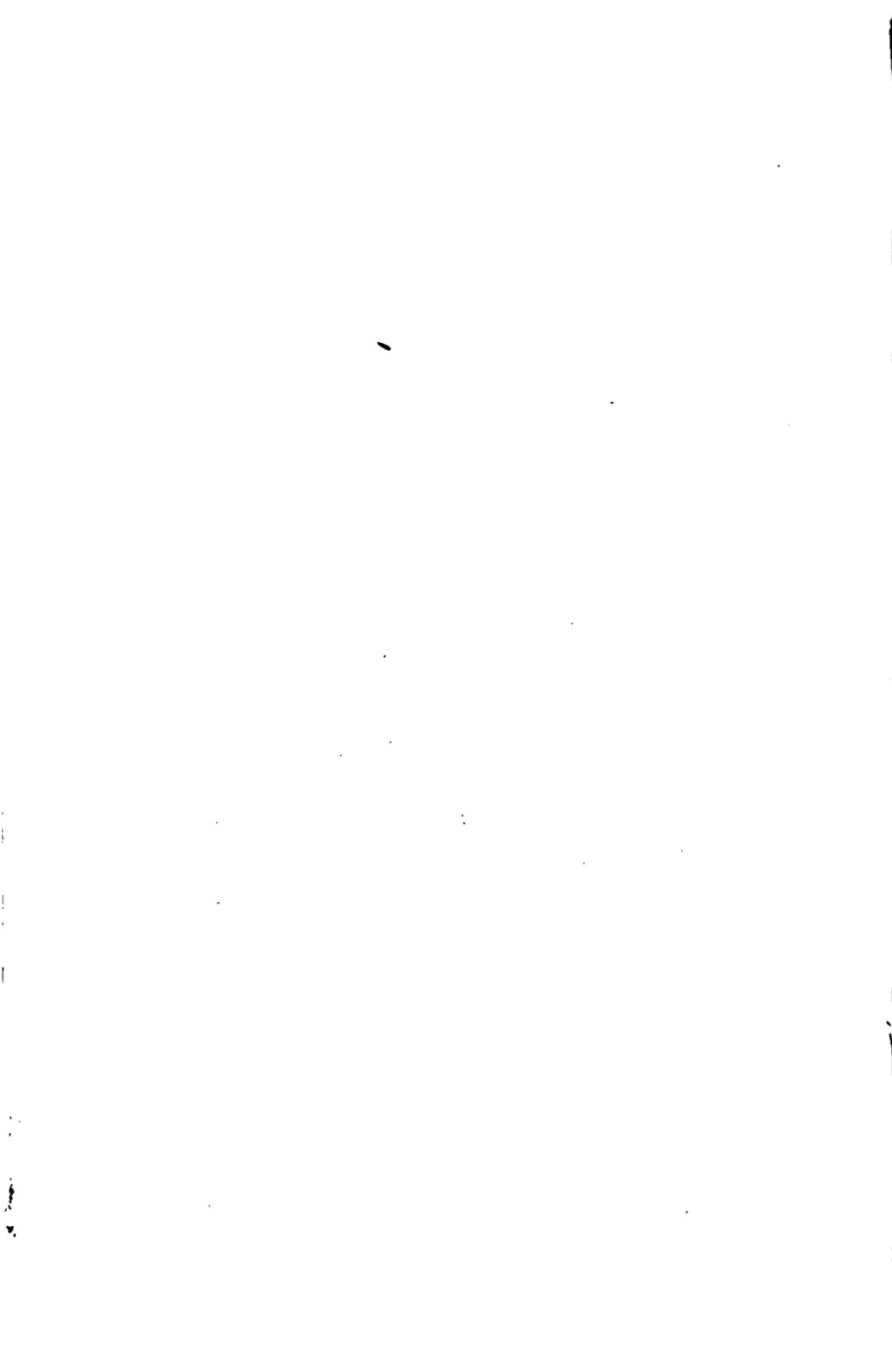
It is needless to attempt a particular enumeration of the many improvements that might be made upon the Country of Orkney, by taking the proper methods ; but it is evident, that in our present untaught state, very little can be expected from our own endeavours,

if entirely unassisted. As our Country, however, is without any exaggeration, like a treasure buried underground, it would be an object not unworthy of the attention of Government itself, to send a few families among us, capable of instructing us in the different branches of manufacture, to which our Country is peculiarly adapted ; by which means, there is great reason to hope, that from a state of mere insignificance, we might very soon become an useful part of the British Empire.

The Author is sensible, that some people will be apt to accuse him of undervaluing his Country, because he hath represented the present state of it in its proper colours ; but as he is

conscious of the uprightness of his intentions, and that nothing is advanced, but what is literally true, he defies the tongue of malice or slander.

FINIS.

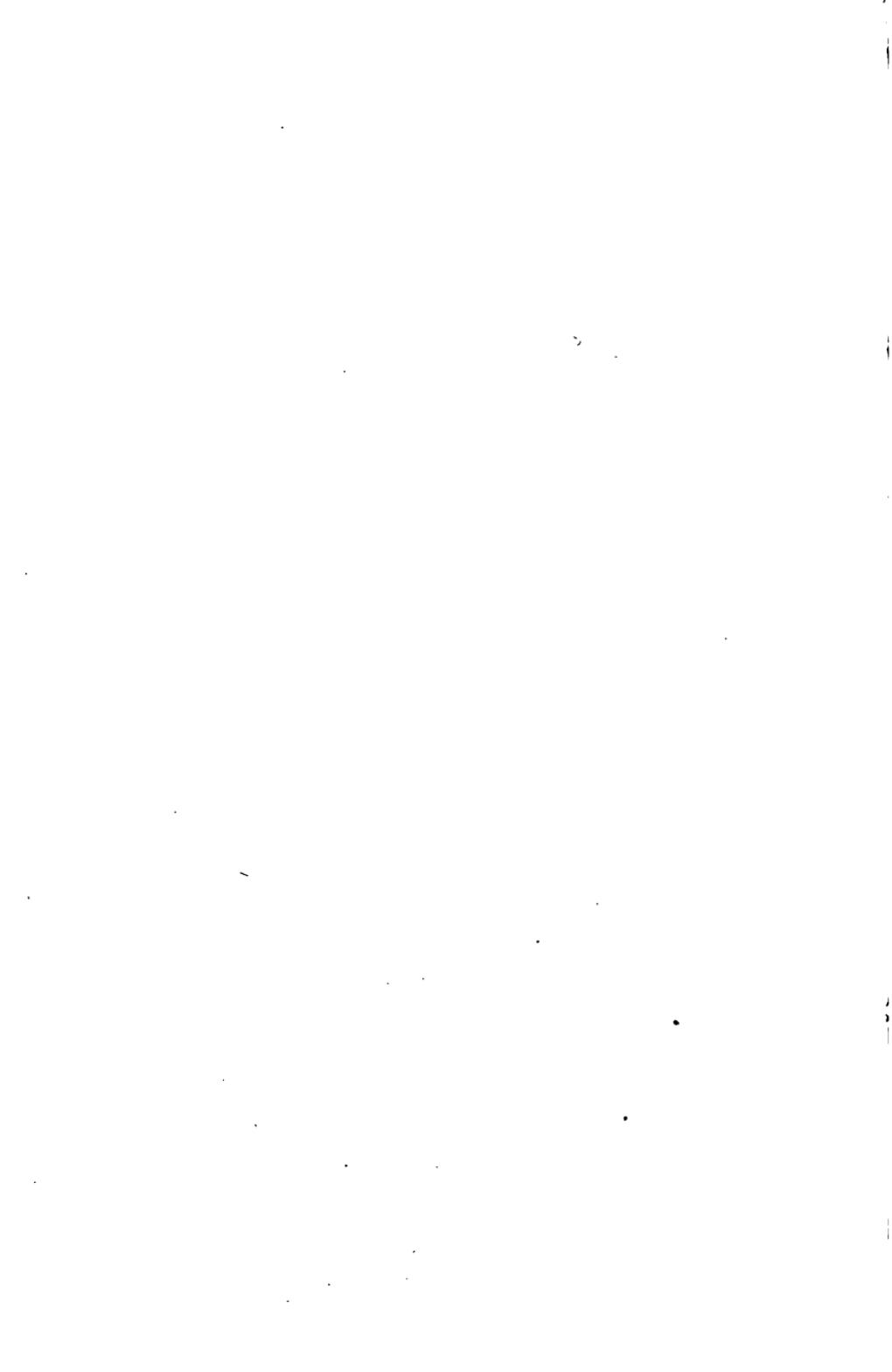


AN ACCOUNT
OF
THE NEW METHOD OF FISHING,
PRACTISED ON THE COASTS OF
S H E T L A N D,
WITH OBSERVATIONS.



H O L Y - R O O D H O U S E ;
Printed in the YEAR

M D C C L X X V.



ACCOUNT
OF
The New Method of
Fishing &c.

HE situation of SHETLAND being so well adapted for the fishing of Ling, Cod and Tusk, and the Returns from thence, in favourable Seasons, so very advantageous, the Gentlemen of that country have for several years past, directed their attention entirely to this fishery ; and therefore have converted

some of the larger farms on their estates into such small ones, as commonly afford the possessors only Potatoe ground, a Cabbage Garden &c. very little, if any, being allowed them for Corn.

By following this method, the Gentlemen are sure to increase the number of fishing boats, and by the same means, to enhance their own prospect of Gain from the fishery, which must be supposed to rise or fall, according to the numbers employed in it.

At the most convenient, as well as customary places of landing, are Booths built, where they throw their fish,

and where the Boat men are supplied with necessaries for the undertaking.—Here they bring, commonly, if not always, from *Gieue-Sound* in Norway, Boats of different sizes. From this market, they are brought in boards, with their In timbers properly marked, so that on their arrival, there is nothing to be done, but to put them up by the Carpenter; and they are then sold at fixed prices, according to their size.—Here, they are also furnished with Lines, Hooks, Leads for Hand-Lines, Spirits &c. and even Shoes, or Apparel of any kind, for themselves or Daughters; and the fishers, by throwing in their fish at a fixed value, according to the different species of them, pay their masters for

what they are thus supplied with from their stores.

The fixed prices given for the fish, differ greatly among the different Proprietors, some giving more, some less ; but, generally speaking, those who allow most to the fishers, are the greatest gainers ; as they are by that means induced to keep all their fish for their masters ; whereas, from those who give less, they withhold great numbers, selling them in a clandestine manner to other boats, or to the Sloops, either at sea, or when they come on shore, to the great disappointment of the Proprietors.

The common fixed prices, given

at the highest and lowest, are as follows.

*A Gild Ling	from 6d. to 4d.
Tusk	3d. to 2d.
Merchantable Cod, 18 Inches,	3d.
Seath, upon an Average,	1d.

The Livers of the fish belong to the fishers, who make them into Oil, which they sell to their masters at so much a Can. †

* A Gild Ling, is one that is unexceptionable as to size, either way ; and when they happen to be much under size, the Fisher then casts three for one. The other Fish you are obliged to take, as per agreement, whatever size they may be, giving an allowance for the number.

† A Zetland measure, containing near two Scots pints.

Besides these prices, many of the Gentlemen give Premiums to the different Boat-steerers, or their Crews, who exert themselves most, or who catch the most fish. These Premiums are paid in money to the Skipper &c. with a genteel gown to his Wife or Sweetheart ; and such as follow this method, are sure to find their account in it ; for nothing will make them exert themselves so much, as an expectation of being distinguished in this manner.

During the Winter, or Spring Seasons, in many parts of the country, they take amazing quantities of Cod, which sets into their *Voes*, as they call them. This is a great help to the poor people, as the catching of them

is attended with little or no danger, and they have the Garbage to themselves.

On the South-west part of the main Island, called *Sumborough-head*, in a very rapid tide, there are great quantities of Seath, or Cole-fish caught; which is a very lucrative fishing, as they abound in Oil, and the fish, though coarse, sell very well at Leith or Newcastle; commonly at 6d. or 8d. each.

The manner of catching the fish.

The fishers being equipped with every thing necessary, against the latter end of May, on the first of June,

they push, in a body, for the HALF, as they term the ordinary distance of laying their Lines. Here they make their first Essay, and continue in the same manner, with the most unwearied application, for six weeks, when the Sun begins to leave them, and the nights increase in darkness. These poor creatures, being at great distances, frequently twelve Leagues or more, from Land, in the German Ocean to the East of their country, as well as to the west, in danger of losing their Lines, through the darkness of the nights, and liable to be blown off, and so perish, are discouraged from continuing their fishing any longer, and give it over for that Season.

Of late years, they are obliged, as it were, to go to a greater distance. Many of the Country Gentlemen, as well as of the Strangers who fish on their Coasts, have Sloops of 50 or 60 Tuns, which commonly take in Tow, or in Charge, sometimes for every third fish, four of these boats. By these Sloops, the boats are towed to the distance of 15 Leagues from Land, arriving at the fishing ground about Sunset.*

* In each boat they have a proper drag, contrived by Mr Cob, a model of which may be seen by applying to the secretary to the Trustees for the improvement of fisheries, for Scotland, for trying the ground. In sandy ground they will not lay their lines, as they look for nothing there, but Holybut or Cod. Therefore they row on,

While they go out, the Skipper of each boat takes care to have his lines properly baited, and every thing ready ; and immediately on their arrival, all the four boats set off at once, steering different courses by their Compasses, which they are supplied with, in order to avoid interfering with one anothers lines ; * and to do so, with greater certainty, they till they come to a rocky or Coral bottom, where Ling and Tusk, which they most want, are found in plenty.

* When this happens, it is a very heavy loss, not only of the lines, but also of the fish. It destroys the fishing for the night ; and in the critical season, in summer, the success of one night may be equal to that of several weeks ; all methods therefore, are tried, to avoid this Capital mistake.

shew signals to each other, by holding up an Oar, when they are going to throw overboard their Buoy, which is commonly made of an ordinary half Anker, strongly tarred, having a large stick fixed through the bung and out at the opposite side, with a parcel of Heath tied to it. The Buoys are so slung to the lines, as that this stick may be always uppermost like a mast ; by which means, they may be seen at very great distances, and this is of great use, when their lines are very long.

The ordinary length of the lines, on the east part of the Island, is from 4 to 500 hooks, at three fathoms and an half between, with Snouds of a

fathom and an half each ; but on the west and north, they have lines of three times that length, with boats proportionably large. These long lines are only laid and hauled once a night, but the others, twice.*

After they have laid their lines, they ly with the boats at the last Buoy ; the Sloops, which succour them, continuing to cruise about,

* In my opinion, the best are those fitted in Mr Cob's manner ; that is by fixing a cork of the size he recommends, which also may be seen at the Trustees office, two part and third on the Snoud, having the third division lowermost with a knot above the cork on the Snoud, by which the Bait on the hook is always suspended by which there is a great saving of Bait, as well as other undeniiable advantages.

cheering them up every now and then, during the night. When they have hauled their lines, they come aboard with their fish and their lines, which last are all divided into lengths of the Boughts, 50 fathoms, and made up on Hoops crossed with Rope-yarns.— Every Skipper now takes care to have his Boat properly moored, before he comes on board; when every man gets a Dram, and half a Bisket, after which they go to rest, and the Sloop stands for the Land, in case of bad weather. But if they have Bait, commonly Holybut or Cod, and fish-Vats on board, in that case, they periodically turn out the fishers to gut, clean, and split the fish, and salt them in those Vats; by which a great deal of time is

saved, being already on the Ground ; and therefore they cruise about till night, the master, in the mean time, ordering out one boat with a line, for Turbot, for Bait, or for food to the crew ; by which a great deal is saved.

It is remarked, that the hotter the day, or the more glaring the Sunshine, the more readily are those fish caught, as well as Cod ; but Ling or Tusk are taken to greater advantage in the night.

Seath or Cole-fish are commonly catched by the smaller boats, which are rowed by two men, who hold an Oar in each hand. Besides the two Rowers, there are other two, who sit,

one in the forehead, and another in the stern, with a line thrown out on the Tide-side, as they dare not venture into the *Roast*, or main of the Tide, for fear of being swallowed up. The two men row as violently as they can, while the other two are employed in observing the lines. These float on the surface of the water, having on the hook, a piece of the belly of the creature, cut in the shape of a Herring, or as near it as possible ; and by this method they catch them during the violence of the Tide, the deceit having the greater effect, in proportion to the more violent agitation of the water.

At this time, these fish are in quest of the Herrings, which they prey

upon ; and when the fishermen happen to find a Herring in the belly of one of them, they never fail to use it with success, as a Bait. When the Tide becomes weak, they plunge deeper in the water ; and then the fishermen put on their Lead, or Sinker, commonly weighing about a pound and an half, letting down their hooks, baited as before, to the depth of about twenty fathoms ; hauling them up again, as quickly as possible. By this means, the fish are deceived by the motion of the Bait, which they imagine to be a live Herring, and so are readily taken. This method, the fishermen call *dragging* for the fish.

The manner of curing the fish.

The proprietors ought particularly to recommend to the fishers, especially to the Skippers of the boats, to see that the throat of every fish be cut, while it is yet alive, by which means it bleeds freely, while it struggles. They ought to be split and salted, as soon as possible ; taking the utmost care, that no blood, or filth of any kind sticks to them, especially at that part of the back bone, where the blood commonly lodges ; from whence it is to be taken out with wooden pickers, and an hard brush ; taking care, not to ruffle the fish with the brush.

If the fish are designed for an home market, the Heads ought to be kept on, as they are then cured with small salt, and will certainly sell the better for having them. But for an Irish, or any other foreign market, as the fish are then cured with great salt the heads must be taken off, before you can obtain the debenture. In this case, as much of the nape of the neck must be left with the fish as possible ; but this must depend, in a great measure, on the experience of the Headers.

The fish-Vats for salting, must be strong and well made. They are usually the length of an ordinary Norway or Bergen double Deal,

running mostly to 8 feet; with heads of the same thickness. They must be strongly bound with cross bars, at the bottom and sides, describing an oblong Square; with a Spigot and Fosset in the middle of the front, to run off the pickle. They must be tarred in the outside, and the Seams chintzed with white Oakhum all through; but no tar on the inside, for fear of spoiling the fish.

The Vat, or Vats, being thus prepared, strew some salt on the boards in the bottom; a very small quantity, if great salt is used, but a larger quantity if small salt, on account of the difference of the quality. Upon this, lay a Row of Ling, Cod &c. at

their full length. Above them strew another quantity of salt, larger or smaller, according to its quality; observing to increase the quantity, put upon every layer of fish, the higher you rise in the Vats; as the salt must have a greater effect upon those first laid down, than on those that are higher.

If too much salt is put on the fish, it will shew, by their being what is called *Salt burned*, and the salt appearing candied upon them. But if they are properly done, they will be green, with the proper bloom on them, which shews their excellence. Great attention should be paid to the drying of them, and for that purpose, a number

of Boys ought always to be employed, to put them out after Sunrise in the morning, and to watch them through the day, for fear of Rain. When that happens, they are to be turned, with the Skin side uppermost, as speedily as possible; for Rain would make them black, and ruin them for market.

The Steeples built in the night, ought to be done with care, and as much in the form of a Pyramid as possible; having all the heads outermost, and the Skin side uppermost, to avoid the Rain, which is most apt to fall in the night; as also the Dews which are very heavy in Summer, especially if the weather is very hot.—Many, very properly, use Mats for

Covering, also Tarpawlins, towards the latter end of Summer, or first of August; when the Seasons break, and our rainy Season sets in.— Beeches are the most proper for drying the fish on, though many use Rocks, but they are not so good.

The curing of Seath or Cole-fish, is attended with no expence, as the pickle in which Ling &c. have been cured, and which would otherwise have been thrown away, serves for that purpose, as well as for curing the Swoons of the Ling, Cod and Tusk, in order to preserve them for exporting to London for the Isinglass manufacture, and sometimes by Commission, for eating.

*Of the BAIT proper for catching the
several kinds of FISH.*

The black Pollock is to be taken with Flies made of the whitest of Feathers, tied on the hooks, and frequently renewed, in case of dulness; for then the fish will not bite.—Small Lines baited with Lug, for Haddocks, small Flounders &c. are excellent; a few large hooks baited with fish, near the shore, for Conger-Eels, will be very proper; as they are the preferable Bait.

Besides these Eels, Piltakes, Whiting, Haddocks, &c. are very proper Bait, for Ling, Cod, or Tusk, but the usual method of killing them in the

Harbour, is very improper; as they become hard before they can be brought to the fishing Ground, and are often scalded, especially in the middle of Summer. It would therefore be advisable, that each boat should have a small well in the stern, under the place where the Skipper sits, into which they might be put, as they are caught.

By this method, more than double the quantity of fish would be taken; that are catched in the common way; as is evident from the success of the Dutch white-fishers, who have the live Lamprey from England, at a great price, commonly 3d. each. These they keep alive, and never fail of

catching ten to one against the Islanders.

In case our Boat-men were frightened at the name of a Well-boat, a temporary one might be made, in the shape of a Boat bored with holes, and so filled with Bait, and towed out to the ground; in the same manner as they bring Flounders alive to Billingsgate.

The Conclusion.

Though I have confined my Observations to the manner of catching and curing the fish on the coasts of Shetland, I cannot see, why it might not be done to equal advantage on

those of Orkney ; provided the fish are there in equal plenty. But it is a melancholy truth, that though the Seas around the Orkneys are much less boisterous, than those about Shetland, with many more accessible harbours, in case of bad weather, yet the Inhabitants of Orkney make no Essay to know whether the fish are there or not. They endeavour to find them indeed, very near the shore ; where some of the Cod kind are caught ; but they are very small, and scarce worth even the pains they bestow upon them. But it is probable, they are to be found in plenty, at greater distances from Land, where they must certainly die of extreme old age. A strong proof of this is, that

they are often found drove on shore, in the time of hard gales of wind, and thus pickt up.

Some degree of apology, however, may be made for the torpid state and indolence of these Islanders ; and the utmost that can be said for them is, that they have no market for their fish when caught ; neither have they any salt to cure them, that they may be kept untill an opportunity of disposing of them occurs. They are also in danger of a seizure at market, if cured with salt made by themselves, and they are certain of the expence of freight ; so that it would never answer for these people to be adventurers themselves ; they must catch the fish for others,

and throw them at a stipulated price,
as the Zetland method is.

On most of the coasts of the Highlands, they have still greater advantages. The water is there very deep, close to the Rock, and the fish naturally seek towards it? so that they carry on that fishery to much greater extent, and with a much greater probability of success, both with the long, and hand lines; the night for the Ling, and the day and night for the Cod. It is well known, that there have been instances of Cod being fished here, to great purpose, within speech of the Land.

FINIS.

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